

from Miami to Haiti is worth your time.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

#### AUTHORIZING APPOINTMENT OF ESCORT COMMITTEE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Presiding Officer of the Senate be authorized to appoint a committee on the part of the Senate to join a like committee on the part of the House of Representatives to escort the President of the United States into the House Chamber for the joint session to be held tonight at 9 p.m.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ISAKSON. I would further ask to be recognized as if in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### THE BUDGET

Mr. ISAKSON. We are back. Tonight, I understand, the Presiding Officer and I will be sitting together at the State of the Union event, which I am pleased to do. It is always a historic and seminal moment in our legislative process when the President of the United States talks about and lays out his plans for the future.

From watching this morning on television and from reading some of the accounts of what is thought will be said tonight—I don't know what is going to be said yet—one of the overriding themes is going to be that of fairness. I think that is an important point for us to focus on in a second, particularly with regard to our spending, our debt, and our deficit, about what is fair to the American people.

Last night—and I brought some notes—I did a telephone townhall meeting back to Georgia. We had thousands of people listening in on the call. I was able to take 17 questions in the course of an hour and one of the questions was from Fred in Barnesville, GA. Fred is a small businessperson. He asked this question: Senator, you were a small businessman; I am a small businessman. We had to operate within a budget. Why is it the U.S. Government doesn't have a budget? I think today is the 1,000th day we have been operating without a budget.

That was a fair question. So if we want to talk about fairness for a

minute, my contribution to fairness is going to be: What is fair to the American people, the American businessman, the American employer, the American employee? Let's think about it for a second.

A budget is a guide by which we try to live under. It is an appropriation of our priorities for the future based on what we think we will need to accomplish our goals. But if we are without a budget, then we have the tendency to do what America has done over the last 3 years; that is, exponentially increase its debt and its deficit. What that has done is put a pall on the recovery and a pall on the economy.

I would suggest the fairest thing we can do in the Congress and the fairest thing the administration can do is to see to it that we have a budget submitted, that it come to the floor of the House and Senate, that it be adopted, and then, more important, that we change our pace around here and live within that budget.

I have some suggestions as to how we do that, but first and foremost I urge the White House to submit a budget this year. I understand, from this morning's announcements, it will be delayed until February 13. That is fine with me. But the quicker we get it to us, the better we are. Then, let the Budget Committees of the House and Senate act, and let us end up with a framework—not just for 1 year but, as the Presiding Officer knows, for 10 years—because we forecast out those budgets and those complications of those budgets for 10 years.

But we have a broken system. We also have a broken will to do what is most important for the American people when it comes to spending their money. I wish to suggest how we change our habits and become a fairer legislative body and a fairer governing body for the American people.

Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN and I introduced a bill 1 year ago called the biennial budget. It amends the Budget Control Act of the United States of America and changes the way we do business. It portends that, in the future, instead of appropriating and budgeting for 1 year, we will do it in 2-year cycles, and we will always do our appropriating and our budgeting in the odd-numbered years so, in the even-numbered year of reelection, we are doing oversight and fiscal responsibility.

I think everybody in this room will admit we make an effort at oversight, to a certain extent, but practically speaking not near the oversight the American people have to do.

It is ironic that our country, our people, our families, our retirees, our business folks, our employees the last 4 years of the recession have sat around their kitchen table lots of times. They reprioritized what they could afford and what they couldn't. They reallocated their resources to take care of their family and their children and they have been frugal and they have been conservative because they have

to. They can't deficit spend. They can't borrow themselves into oblivion. They can't print the money and they can't write the checks. Don't you think the government of the people who are having to do that ought to have to at least live under the same set of circumstances?

We need for this room to become a big kitchen table, big enough for 100 people of good will to sit down together. We need a White House that will submit a budget we can then argue about and set the priorities of this country and try and put a governor on what we are spending, try and put some type of accountability for where we are going, try and forecast into the future what it is the American people can expect of all of us.

So when tonight the President talks about fairness, I hope one of his quotes will be: It is only fair to expect me, the President, to submit a budget to the Congress, and it is only fair for me, the President, to expect the Congress to act on that budget—because, after all, everything else flows from that. In the absence of budget responsibility, budget restrictions, budget projections, and a calculus for the future, we are spending without any governor or guide. It is akin to trying to drive from here to Alaska without a roadmap. I couldn't get there. I would probably have a wreck. I would probably run off the road because we don't know where we are going and we don't know how we are getting there.

Unfortunately, of all the institutions in America, there is only one that doesn't know where it is going and how it is getting there, and that happens to be the government of the United States of America.

So my message, this day of the State of the Union and this statement of fairness, let's be fair to the American people. Let's ask of ourselves what they are having to ask of themselves because of high deficits and high debt. Those living on fixed incomes are seeing interest rates of 0.25 percent—almost negligible. Markets have been flat in terms of investment. Real estate values are down 33 percent nationwide. I saw last night in Tampa, where the Presidential debate was, it is 52 percent. The worst it got post-1929 was 31 percent.

We have the most significant, serious financial crisis in the history of the United States of America, and it is impacting our families and our people.

So let's ask of ourselves, let's ask of our President what every American family has had to ask of itself—sit around our kitchen table and budget and prioritize. I would submit Senator SHAHEEN and I have a roadmap that works for process. It says do it in 2-year cycles, so we are committed to spending in 1 year and we are committed to savings, efficiency, accountability, and repealing out-of-date programs the other year.

Wouldn't it be a great change in the body of politics for you and for I to be

campaigning in even-numbered years, talking about what we are looking to save and cut, rather than what we are going to do to bring home the bacon?

I think the day of bacon coming home reckoning is here, and it is time for the next bacon to be brought home to be a sound budget and fiscal policy for the people of the United States of America.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### SENATOR MARK KIRK

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I wish to, similar to all my colleagues, express our sympathy and support and prayers for our colleague, Senator KIRK.

Senator KIRK is someone who is new to the Senate but served for a good number of years in the House of Representatives and has already made a tremendous impact in coming to the Senate—incredibly smart, hard-working, thoughtful, knowledgeable on so many different subjects. So obviously we will miss his presence in the near term but hope and pray for a full, quick, complete recovery and hope to have him back with us soon. I know I speak for many of my colleagues, but I certainly wish to express my and my family's prayers and support for Senator KIRK and for his family as he tries to get back on his feet. We wish him all the best as he does that and hope he will return soon and be able to get involved in many of the issues he was involved with and has been involved with since he has come to the Senate.

#### THE BUDGET

If he were here, I think he would be very involved in the debates we are going to be having in the coming days about the budget. Today marks the 1,000th day since we have actually acted on a budget in the United States. That is something many people here who are interested in fiscal policy are very concerned about. Senator KIRK is one of those. I consider myself to be one of those. We have a lot of people in the Senate who are very concerned about where we are as a nation, about the amount of spending, the amount of debt we have racked up and continue to pile up on an annual basis. It all starts with a budget.

We spend \$3.6 trillion of the American people's money on an annual basis. Yet we have not had a budget in the Senate for 1,000 days, literally now for 3 years, essentially, since the Senate last passed a budget.

We cannot continue with a straight face to go to the American people and

say we are being good stewards of their tax dollars when, in fact, we don't even go through the exercise annually of determining and prioritizing how we are going to spend their hard-earned tax dollars. This is something that cries out for reform.

My colleague Senator ISAKSON, who just spoke, has some proposals for budget reform that I think we ought to take up and we ought to vote on in the Senate. I have some ideas about budget reform. There is so much we need to do to change the budget process in the Congress because we have failed to pass a budget resolution, not just for the past 1,000 days but also for 5 of the last 7 election years, and we have only completed all the annual appropriations bills on time in 4 of the last 34 years. We clearly have a problem. I don't think there is anybody here who can't say this system is broken and needs to be fixed.

It strikes me, at least, that as we went through the 2012 budget process, we failed again to complete the appropriations work on time, and so we had to go through this annual exercise of doing a nearly \$1 trillion omnibus spending bill at the eleventh hour yet again. During the past 3 years, we have consistently had record deficits of \$1.3 trillion or more.

Clearly, what we have in place is not working, and the American people are the ones who are paying the price for that because the debt per person is now over \$48,700. That is an increase of nearly \$14,000 on an individual basis since President Obama took office.

If we think about it on a per household basis, it represents \$126,000 per American family, per household that is their share of our Federal debt. That is a massive amount of money we pile onto people in this country.

If we add in the unfunded liabilities for Social Security and Medicare, which exceed \$40 trillion, then we start talking about over \$½ million in liability for every family in this country.

The national debt is now more than \$15 trillion, which is literally over 100 percent of our gross domestic product. To put that into perspective, 1 year ago, Greece was at 143 percent. We are not far behind. We are now 1 to 1, 100 percent debt to GDP. We are seeing the effect of high levels of sovereign debt on the economies of European countries such as Greece, and if we fail to get spending in our country on a sustainable path, we are going to face a similar crisis in the not-too-distant future. If we continue to see an economy that is struggling and growing at a very slow rate, we cannot grow that economy by making the Federal Government larger. If that is the case, the \$1 trillion stimulus bill that passed in 2009 would have brought unemployment down. But, as we know, the unemployment rate in this country is still at 8.5 percent.

So we have to unleash the economy. We need to cut spending in Washington, DC. We have to make the Fed-

eral Government smaller, not larger, and get Federal spending as a percentage of our gross domestic product, as a percentage of our entire economy, back to more of a historical average.

Today, the spending as a percentage of our GDP is about 25 percent. If we go over the last 40 years of American history, the average has been 20 to 21 percent. Ironically, there have only been five times since 1969 where the budget has actually been balanced. In those cases where the budget was balanced, spending as a percentage of GDP was 18.7 percent, on average.

So it can be done. But we have to get spending back to a more historic and reasonable level relative to our entire economy.

The debt to GDP, as I mentioned earlier, is also historic because we haven't seen debt-to-GDP levels such as this literally since the end of World War II. We would have to go back over half a century to find a time when we were carrying debt to GDP that was literally 1 to 1, where the amount of debt we have in this country is 100 percent of our entire economic output in a given year. That is a staggering number and one that should make us all very concerned about our future if we don't take steps to correct it.

I think that point was driven home by the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Mike Mullen, who has said in testifying before congressional committees that the greatest threat to America's national security is our national debt.

Think about that. He didn't say the Iranian nuclear program. He didn't say China. He didn't say North Korea. He didn't say al-Qaida. He said the greatest threat to America's national security is our national debt—that coming from the person who used to be the highest ranking military official in this country.

I think that speaks volumes about what we need to be focused on and why it is so important we start getting our budgetary, our fiscal house in order and why it is so important, frankly, that we pass a budget. One thousand days without a budget, and we spend \$3.6 trillion every single year of the American people's money.

I think, again, in order to get our fiscal house in order, in order to get our economy back on track, we have to cut spending. We have to reduce the amount we spend. That means we have to take on some of the big challenges before us, such as entitlement reform.

We all know about three-fifths of all Federal spending is what we call mandatory spending, and that represents programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid that are not annually appropriated for by Congress but are a function of the law. If a person is eligible for a particular program they are going to get a benefit under that program. That type of spending in our budget represents about three-fifths of all Federal spending. If we add interest on the debt, which is also mandatory spending, we get up to about 65